

# **The Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Batcombe**

**was held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025 at 7.30pm in the Jubilee Hall.**

Janet Jones, Chair of the Parish Council presided. Five members of the Parish Council and the Clerk attended, together with a further fifty parishioners and the Somerset Councillor, Rob Reed. Apologies were received from Peter Glaisher.

Janet Jones **welcomed** parishioners to the meeting.

**Minutes of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting** were read by the Clerk, agreed and signed. The Chair proposed that at future Annual Parish Meetings the Minutes which were published on the Parish Council website be taken as read and this was agreed.

There were no **Matters Arising**.

Janet Jones gave the **Chair's Report**. She had been re-elected Parish Council Chair at the May 2024 Annual Parish Council Meeting and Peter Glaisher had been re-elected as Vice Chair.

Alex Wiltshire had resigned as one of our Somerset Councillors in March 2024 and Rob Reed from Evercreech was elected in his place at a by-election in May 2024. The difficult financial position of the Somerset Council was likely to have financial implications for the Parish Council but the position was not yet clear.

Jayne Cox was thanked for attending meetings of the Shepton Local Community Network, one of 18 LCNs set up to provide an intermediate level between the Somerset Council and the Parish Council. Peter Glaisher was thanked for attending the Highways and Traffic Subgroup of the Shepton LCN.

In 2024/25 there were 16 planning applications, of which five were for full or householder planning. The Parish Council had recommended approval of all these applications. The Parish Council was not consulted on an application for Prior Approval of a Class Q conversion of seven agricultural buildings at Beeches Farm to nine residential dwellings. This application was approved and the developer had indicated to the Parish Council that he proposed to make a new build application for six dwellings at Beeches Farm in place of the Class Q conversions.

The Parish Council continues to be concerned about the condition of our roads and there were particular concerns with blocked gulleys and with the safety of roads when the water on them froze in icy weather. An Enhanced Highways Maintenance pilot had been proposed that would allow parish councils to purchase work directly from Somerset Council's contractors at a cost of £685 a day (for two men with a lorry and small tools). More specialist work would also be available at cost as well as training for volunteers to work on the highway. Ian Sage was thanked for ordering and installing a new grit bin by the War Memorial at Westcombe.

Concerns had been raised about speeding in the parish, particularly along Kale Street and the danger to children and vulnerable pedestrians. However, speed data provided by the Somerset Council's Traffic Engineer and obtained from SatNavs and GPS trackers showed that speeds on Kale Street and elsewhere in Batcombe were actually slower than when the last speed survey had been undertaken in 2008. The bridleway at Honeycliff had been washed out again and repaired, but plans to divert water way from the bridleway had not been approved by the landowners that would be affected.

Kevin Gale from Wanstrow was thanked for cutting the Playing Field grass. There had been a serious mole problem in the Playing Field this year, but the local molecatcher had caught four moles which seemed to have dealt with the problem. Peter Glaisher and Tom Price were thanked for cutting the inside of the Playing Field hedge and John Wiltshire was thanked for cutting the outside of the hedge without charging.

One of the plaques on the gateposts by the pedestrian entrance to the Playing Field had gone missing. The plaques denote the fact that the Playing Field was a dedicated King George V Playing Field. There had been an issue with wasps and hornets in the Playing Field during the summer and a pest control expert had stated that the wasps were being attracted by the willow and the hornets by the large number of wasps. The Parish Council had therefore agreed to remove the willow structures.

The cost of the electricity supply to the Playing Field, which was only used once a year for the Village Fete, had risen significantly because of rises in the standing charge. The Fete Committee was asked to contribute £120 which was half the cost of supplying the electricity to the Fete, while the Parish Council had switched electricity suppliers when their contract was due for renewal, reducing the standing charge from 63p per day to 45p.

Peter Glaisher was thanked for co-ordinating with the allotment holders and ensuring that the allotments field was kept tidy. There were currently two vacant allotments and the Parish Council would consider the future of the allotments, as they were not being used by local people.

The Parish Council made a one-off grant of £500 to the Friends of Batcombe Church to go towards the repair of the Church Clock. (The Parish Council has the power to assist another body in providing a public clock under the Parish Councils Act of 1957.) The Parish Council also increased its grant to the Village Hall Trust by £100 to £300; of which roughly half paid for the cost of the Council's own meetings and remainder met the cost of village organisations using the Old School for committee meetings free of charge. The Parish Council also increased its grant to the Parochial Church Council for the maintenance of the churchyard by £100 to £300; and made grants of £100 each to Mendip Community Transport and Citizens Advice Somerset.

The Parish Council website and the Parish Council Facebook page were regularly updated. Jayne Cox was thanked for representing the Parish Council on the Village Hall Trust. In January 2025 the Parish Council decided to increase its precept for 2025/26 by £925 to £11,000, an increase of 7.3%, in order to provide additional funds for potential costs that the Parish Council might need to fund as a result of the financial difficulties of the Somerset Council. Griff Williams was thanked for undertaking the internal audit of the Parish Council's accounts.

**Somerset Councillor's Comments.** Rob Reed was one of two Somerset Councillors for the South Mendip Division and noted that his colleague Claire Sulley sent regular reports to the Parish Council. He also noted that the District Councils had been pressganged together in a unitary authority to save money. The reorganisation was almost complete so the new Council should begin working better, although he noted that there were a lot of vacancies, with, for example, only two Rights of Way Officers for the whole of Somerset.

Rob encouraged residents to keep reporting potholes and if there were any issues to contact him. Somerset should be getting some of the extra money for fixing potholes. Rob noted that the Somerset Council was £100 million in debt last year and couldn't begin paying off the debt until the redundancies from the reorganisation had been paid off. Once this was done the Council could begin recruiting new officers.

**Shaping Our Community for the Future.** Highlights from a film by Derek Gregory on the building of the Jubilee Hall and its official opening by Prince Charles were shown. Janet Jones was congratulated for extracting the highlights from a 1 hour 45 minute film.

Janet then introduced Tom Price and Tim Chater who gave a presentation on bringing the community together. They noted that change was constant – as seen from the number of dairy farms in the parish in the past compared to today. A banner produced in 2000 showed 31 interest groups in the parish – many of whom were no longer in existence. It was noted that the number of volunteers in the parish was diminishing, which might be a result of the changing nature of the parish. At the same time the parish was facing challenges from the reduction in support from the Somerset Council, with no gritting and the poor condition of the roads, and the impact of

global warming beginning to affect the community. But there were still communal activities happening in the parish, like the litter pick and the Annual Fete.

Tom and Tim proposed a Community Review to find out what residents wanted. This would be a questionnaire to get everyone's view on what they wanted for the future of the parish. A Steering Group would organise a Launch Event between April and June. There would be a three-week survey between July and September and then a report back on the survey sometime between October and December.

It was noted that Wanstrow had produced a Parish Plan, which had resulted in a new Village Hall. It was suggested that a plan could lead to restoration of the fingerposts, an improved footpath network or contractors clearing gulleys. It would be away to work together to improve and bolster assets such as the Village Hall and get more people involved in the community. It could also raise funds, for example by a voluntary contribution by visitors staying in the parish.

It was asked how this tied in with the upcoming Village Hall meeting. Karen Slocombe asked that as many people as possible attend the meeting as the Village Hall Trust needed to have the community behind the buildings.

Asked who would decide which questions were included in the survey, Tim Chater stated that the Community Council for Somerset who were managing the survey would advise on what questions to include.

It was noted that the people in the Hall that evening were of a certain age and asked how younger people could be involved. Janet Jones noted that the people who had helped build the Hall were all of a certain age.

Janet asked if more help was needed with the survey and the answer was that it would be great if people were interested. Tim Chater noted that the membership of the Steering Committee had not yet been finalised.

Janet Jones then closed the meeting, thanking everyone for coming.